

1. A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:
initiating a print task;
transmitting said print task to a print system component;
dividing and distributing said print task among a plurality of printing devices with said print system component; and
providing load-balancing between said plurality of printing devices.
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- 10 2. The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing and said distributing comprise job splitting.
- 15 3. The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing and said distributing comprise copy splitting.
- 20 4. The method of claim 1 wherein said providing load-balancing comprises obtaining printer capability data from said plurality of printing devices.
- 25 5. The method of claim 4 wherein said printer capability data comprises a rate at which at least one of said plurality of printing devices prints pages.
- 30 6. The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing, said distributing and said providing load-balancing comprise dividing said print task among said plurality of printing devices according to the speed of each printing device.
- 35 7. The method of claim 1 further comprising querying at least one printing device to determine at least one of its capabilities.
- 40 8. The method of claim 1 further comprising querying at least one printing device to determine its availability.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing, said distributing and said providing load-balancing comprise dividing said print task, when said print task comprises multiple copies of a print job, into sets of copies of said print job, each of said sets comprising a number of copies proportional to the number of pages per minute (PPM) each printer can print.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein said dividing, said distributing and said providing load-balancing comprise dividing said print task, when said print task comprises multiple and distinct print jobs, into sets of distinct print jobs, each of said sets comprising a number of pages proportional to the number of pages per minute (PPM) each printer can print.

11. A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:
initiating a print task;
transmitting said print task to a print system component;
determining said printing devices' capabilities; and
dividing and distributing said print task among said plurality of printing devices in proportion to the capabilities of said printing devices, using said print system component.
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- 10 12. The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises querying a local printer through a system bus.
- 15 13. The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises querying a network printer using a network communications protocol.
- 20 14. The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises querying a printer driver.
- 25 15. The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises accessing a printer attribute registry.
- 30 16. The method of claim 11 wherein said print system component comprises a print processor.
17. The method of claim 11 wherein said determining comprises estimating the capability of some of said plurality of printing devices.

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18. A method for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said method comprising:
initiating a print task;
transmitting said print task to a print system component;
determining said printing devices' capabilities; and
dividing and distributing said print task among said plurality of printing devices in proportion to the throughput of each of said printing devices, using said print system component.

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19. The method of claim 18 wherein said throughput comprises a printer's speed in PPM.

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20. The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said throughput comprises a determination of a printing device's disk storage capacity.

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21. The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said throughput comprises an analysis of a printing device's rasterization pipeline.

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22. The method of claim 18 wherein a determination of said throughput comprises an evaluation of alternative rasterization methods and a selection of the fastest method for a specific print task.

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23. A printing system component for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said component comprising:
a determiner for determining printing device capabilities;
a divider for dividing a print task into print sets, said sets being
proportioned according to the capabilities of each printing device in said plurality
of printing devices; and
5 a distributor for distributing said sets to each printing device in said
plurality of printing devices.

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24. A computer-readable medium comprising instructions for distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said instructions comprising the acts of:

5 initiating a print task;

transmitting said print task to a print system component;

determining said printing devices' capabilities; and

dividing and distributing said print task among said plurality of printing devices in proportion to the capabilities of said printing devices, using said print system component.

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25. A computer data signal embodied in an electronic transmission, said signal having the function of distributing a print task among a plurality of printing devices, said signal comprising instructions for:

- initiating a print task;
- transmitting said print task to a print system component;
- determining said printing devices' capabilities; and
- dividing and distributing said print task among said plurality of printing devices in proportion to the capabilities of said printing devices, using said print system component.